

What About Those Who Never Heard The Gospel?

Someone once said, "Many things in the Bible I cannot understand; many things in the Bible I only think I understand; but there are many things in the Bible I cannot misunderstand." One of the things that cannot be misunderstood is the absolute necessity of belief in Christ for salvation. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). After His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, Peter preached, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus did not claim that He is the best way to God but the only way to God. Salvation can only be realized by one who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is not optional!

However, there are those who raise an objection: "What about those who have never heard the Gospel?" This question is born of genuine concern for those souls who may have not had the same opportunities to hear the Gospel and weigh the evidence contained within pertaining to the deity of Jesus. Consideration of the following facts could help ease these concerns.

God Has Revealed Himself to All Via Creation

Throughout all the ages, God's infinite power and deity are revealed through creation. Paul wrote that pagans, "suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:18-21). This darkening of the heart led to idolatry. "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Romans 1:25).

God Is Within Reach of All

Not only has God revealed Himself to all men throughout the ages through His creation, He is accessible to every man in every nation. Paul spoke to

the Greek philosophers on Mar's Hill in Athens in regard to the altar to the Unknown God. "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'" (Acts 17:26-28). Wherever a man is born - no matter which culture or continent - God is within his reach. "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Sincere seekers can find God. The Bible itself testifies to the fact that there are those who will be saved out of every people on the earth. "And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation'" (Revelation 5:9).

God Has Put Eternity in the Hearts of All

Solomon wrote that God "has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end" (Eccl. 3:11). God has clearly revealed Himself to all people yet there are some things we cannot know. However, is there life after death? If a man dies will he live again? All men concern themselves about life after death. All men of all ages have struggled with the idea of mortality and immortality. The God of the Bible declares that man does have an immortal soul and there is life after death, but only through belief in His Son.

God Has Put a Law in the Hearts of All

Everyone everywhere seems to have this innate sense of right and wrong. Even the atheist who claims there is no God and thus no absolute standard of morality will blame God for the evil and suffering in this world. According to Paul God put the law in our hearts and consciences that we might seek Him. "For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their

thoughts accusing or else excusing them)" (Romans 2:12-15). People do not need a Bible to figure out the crime of murder or the evils of lying or the wickedness of adultery or the scourge of stealing. Within man (as opposed to animals) alone is this sense of justice and morality. To seek for the source of this peculiar human attribute leads us to God. He is the Truth and the Holy One.

God Has Sent His Son to All

While man seeks for God, God has been working on a plan to seek those who are lost. God has revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). This was not the only reason Christ came to the earth. The Father sent the Son to save everyone. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Yet, salvation is conditional. God does not indiscriminately or universally save without conditions. Christianity is not extremely exclusive. Instead salvation in Christ is inordinately inclusive. Christ is an equal opportunity Redeemer. His blood was shed for all and salvation is available to all who respond to the preaching of the Gospel.

God Has Sent Out Preachers to All

When Saul of Tarsus was weeping and praying for three days in Damascus God sent a preacher to him to tell him what he must do to be saved (Acts 9). When the Roman Centurion Cornelius was searching for God, Peter was sent to bring him words of salvation (Acts 10). As the Ethiopian was traveling down the road from Jerusalem an angel and the Holy Spirit were making preparations for Philip to join him and preach unto him Jesus (Acts 8). The plan of God to save man involves the hearing the Word of God about His Son in order to produce faith. "For 'whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ... So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:13,14,17).

Paul claimed that the Gospel had been "preached to every creature under heaven" by AD 63 (Col. 1:23). A Roman sword dug up in Arizona and a Roman galley sunk at the mouth of the Amazon river point to the possibility of the Gospel reaching distant civilizations in the first century. Furthermore, the Bible is the most widely produced, most often read, most frequently distributed book in almost every language in

the world.

Today stories abound across the globe of men and women who are seeking and are finding the Truth. A sailor found himself in the brig time and again. One day he picked up a Bible in his cell and started to read. He wanted to find the church he read about in the New Testament. One day while walking back to base a stranger stopped and gave him a ride. Noticing the Bible in the front seat of this stranger's car he asked about the church he attend. In a matter of weeks the sailor obeyed the Gospel and is now sharing it with others. The biggest problem is not finding God, but deciding to seek Him in the first place.

God Will Justly Judge All

Belief in Christ is necessary for salvation for every man and every man will face Christ as their Judge. Christ never committed any injustice while on this earth. If He had He would not have been our Savior. He will not commit any injustice on Judgment Day or else He cannot be a just Judge. When Abraham was interceding with God on behalf of Sodom he prayed, "*Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (Genesis 18:25). It is inferred in the Scriptures that all punishment is not the same for everyone (Luke 12:47,48). The greater the opportunity, the greater the accountability before the Judge.

What about all those good, decent folks who have not heard of Christ? First of all, there is none that are good. All have sinned (Romans 3:23). Furthermore, no one will be saved because they are good, instead they will be saved because of God's grace. Additionally all those who are judged worthy of Hell are going there because of their sins not because they did not have the same opportunities as someone else. Since the Judge of all men, died for all men and loves all men He naturally wants all men to be saved.

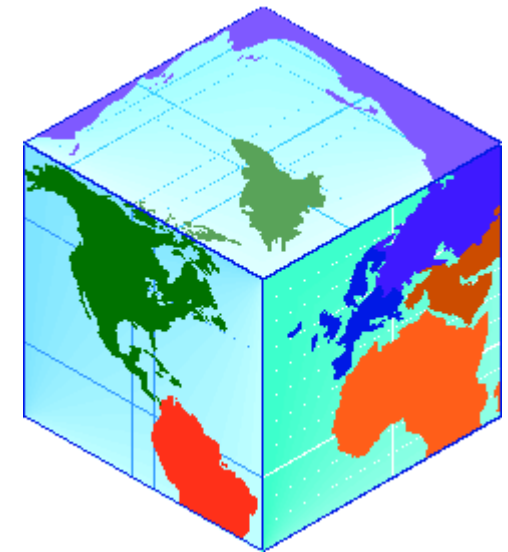
God Waits For the Repentance of All

While waiting on the Day of Judgment two things can be done to resolve this apparent moral dilemma about the salvation of those who may have not heard the Gospel. First, the lost can seek for God and salvation through His Son in His Word. Second, the saved who are concerned about the lost can get busy making sure they have every opportunity to hear the Gospel. After all, this is why God is waiting and has not sent His Son in Judgment of the world. "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as somecount slackness,*

but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God is not a slacker. He delays the Day of Judgment so everyone will have time to repent. Yet, many of those who will be lost are slackers. God cannot delay forever. Neither can He force anyone to repent.

If you are genuinely concerned about the opportunities of the lost to be saved there are two things you need to be busy doing. First, make sure you hear and obey the Gospel. Second, get busy sharing the Gospel at every opportunity.

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Your are Invited to attend the

Forum Terrace Church of Christ

which meets at

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Service Times

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Bible Study.....9:30 am

Worship Service.....10:30 am

Worship Service.....5:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study.....7:30 pm

by Daniel R. Vess